

**MINUTES OF GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP #19
THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a General Plan Workshop at 7:04 p.m. on Wednesday, September 23, 2009 in the Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Browning.

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Browning, Busch, Gibson, Horwich, Skoll, Uchima and Chairperson Weideman.

Absent: None.

Also Present: Deputy Community Development Director Cessna, Planning Manager Lodan, Sr. Planning Associate Chun, Planning Associate Cutting, Planning Associate Kevin Joe, Deputy City Attorney Sullivan, and Transportation Planning Manager Semaan.

4. GENERAL PLAN UPDATE OVERVIEW

Planning Manager Lodan noted that the purpose of tonight's workshop was to review the final drafts of the General Plan Elements and receive comments from the Planning Commission and the public. He advised that the General Plan includes changes in Land Use Designations in certain study areas and an effort was made to maintain a balance of commercial, industrial and residential sectors and to minimize negative impacts on established neighborhoods, while incorporating densities necessary to comply with the City's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocation in order to maintain a State certified Housing Element.

5. DRAFT GENERAL PLAN PRESENTATION

With the aid of slides, Laura Stetson, Hogle-Ireland, General Plan Consultant, briefly reviewed the General Plan Update process, which began in 2004 and included 18 Planning Commission Workshops along with input from various other City commissions and homeowner associations. She noted that the General Plan consists of six elements: Land Use, Circulation and Infrastructure, Community Resources, Safety, Noise, and Housing, and sets out a course of action for the City over the next 20 years.

Land Use Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the draft Land Use Element. She reported the following:

- That the “Residential Office” Land Use Designation was created to allow for low intensity mixed-use developments.
- That the “Hospital-Medical” Land Use Designation was created to allow for the orderly expansion of Torrance Memorial and Little Company of Mary hospitals and related health care facilities.
- That the Land Use Designation “Local Commercial” will be eliminated and existing properties so designated will be changed to “General Commercial,” which would allow an FAR (Floor Area Ratio) of up to 1.0 for mixed-use developments.

Ms. Stetson reviewed the proposed changes to the seven study areas that were identified in community workshops as transitional, non-functional, or blighted:

1. Crenshaw/Amsler – maintain commercial use along Crenshaw with opportunities for residential uses to the east.
2. Western Avenue South – change underperforming commercial area to allow for residential uses consistent with residential uses to the east in the City of Los Angeles.
3. Border Avenue - create Residential Office zone to serve as a buffer between industrial/commercial and residential uses.
4. Western Avenue North – change to General Commercial to allow for a greater diversity of uses in the commercial area and ensure that there is appropriate transition for residential neighborhoods to the west.
5. Redondo Beach Boulevard – change to reflect the pattern and density of residential uses already built, including changing Radium property to residential use.
6. East Victor Precinct – No changes proposed.
7. Jefferson/Oak – establish a mix of commercial and residential uses to reflect current development.

Ms. Stetson explained that the Urban Design component of the Land Use Element focuses on policies to improve the overall appearance of Torrance, accentuate gateways, and encourage design that promotes walking and/or bicycling. She further explained that the Economic Development component consists of policies designed to maintain a strong and diverse economic base.

Ms. Stetson invited questions and comments on the Land Use Element.

In response to Commissioner Skoll’s inquiry, Ms. Stetson confirmed that in areas where land use designations are proposed to change, existing uses, such as the Radium swap meet, would be allowed to continue operating until such time as the property is redeveloped.

Chairperson Weideman asked if the Radium would be allowed to rebuild if damaged by fire, and staff offered to research this issue.

Commissioner Busch noted that Section 1.3.5, “Implications of Land Use Policy,” indicates that implementation of the Land Use Plan to 75% of the maximum potential would result in 3,100 additional dwelling units, 7,800 new residents, and 1.3 million additional square feet of non-residential development over the a 20-year period ending

in 2025 and asked if these figures were consistent with past growth according to census data.

Ms. Stetson explained that future growth is hard to predict because there are many factors that affect development, including economic conditions, and the General Plan focuses on creating capacity for growth.

Referring to the Crenshaw/Amsler study area, Commissioner Browning noted that a new spa has been approved for this area, which has an option to purchase a nearby church property it will be using for parking, and questioned how proposed land use changes would be affected if the spa exercises this option.

Deputy Community Development Director Cessna advised that the proposed change in Land Use Designation would provide the opportunity for residential development, which allows the City to receive credit toward its Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocation, but such development would only take place if sufficient land is available and someone wants to develop it.

Commissioner Browning stated that there appears to be a lot of vacancies in downtown Torrance mixed-used developments designed with offices downstairs and residences upstairs and questioned whether staff believes the Residential Office designation will be successful or if it was being created to satisfy the City's RHNA allocation.

Planning Manager Lodan stated that staff believes this concept will be successful and attributed the vacancies in the downtown area to other factors, including lack of parking and building constraints. He noted that two such projects have already been entitled on Hawthorne Boulevard and another one is in the development process.

Ms. Stetson confirmed that the suitability of this type of development in Torrance was studied as part of this process.

Chairperson Weideman questioned what density is required to receive credit for low income housing. Ms. Stetson advised that a minimum of 30 units per acre qualifies as affordable housing per the State and confirmed that the City will achieve its RHNA allocation with the proposed changes in the Land Use Element, which must be consistent with the Housing Element.

Commissioner Uchima asked if the Land Use Element addresses Torrance's aging population in terms of providing senior housing and related services.

Ms. Stetson advised that State law does not allow the City to designate specific sites for senior housing, however, the densities proposed in the Land Use Element would accommodate higher-density senior developments, which would act as an incentive for developers to build senior housing for those capable of independent living. With regard to assisted living facilities, she explained that this type of facility would continue to be allowed in commercial areas and noted that the implementation of the Hospital/Medical Land Use Designation would help provide support facilities.

Commissioner Busch related his understanding that there has been an increase in young families in Torrance as evidenced by the increase in school population. Noting

vacancies in a recently built senior development and a strip mall, he questioned whether the Land Use Element provides the necessary flexibility to deal with future economic trends.

Ms. Stetson expressed confidence that the Land Use Element creates appropriate opportunities for future development.

Commissioner Gibson asked if senior developments could be converted to other uses if it turns out that there is no demand for this type of housing. Ms. Stetson advised that senior developments typically must remain age-restricted because of more lenient parking requirements.

Circulation and Infrastructure Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the Circulation and Infrastructure Element. She explained that an extensive study was done of the City's roadwork network to determine long-term needs with the goal of ensuring that the street system maintains a Level of Service (LOS) "D," which is fairly standard for a suburban/urban area. She noted that intersection/signal improvements have been proposed to maintain satisfactory service levels as outlined in Table CI-4. She reported that no changes to street functions are proposed other than to change Ocean Avenue and Newton Street from "Collector" to "Local" streets and making Del Amo Boulevard and Plaza Del Amo through streets. She pointed out that this element also addresses water, sewer, storm drains, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure, as well as oil and gas lines in Torrance.

Community Resources Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the Community Resources Element, which addresses open space, community enrichment, and the conservation of resources, including cultural/ historical resources. She reported that as required by Assembly Bill 32, this element puts policies in place to reduce the City's carbon footprint and decrease greenhouse gases. With regard to historic preservation, she explained that this element includes policies that promote historic preservation and encourage support of local historic groups while balancing the interests of private property owners.

Safety Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the Safety Element, which addresses natural and human activity hazards, emergency response and public safety. She reported that the element includes maps of earthquake fault zones and policies to minimize risks from earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and fires, as well as risks related to the ExxonMobil refinery's activities. She noted that Torrance has superior emergency services and is well prepared for natural and man-made disasters.

Noise Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the Noise Element, which addresses noise from the two main sources of noise in Torrance - major roadways and Torrance Municipal Airport. She noted that ambient noise levels are not expected to increase in Torrance over the next 20 years except for a small increase adjacent to some roadways due to increased traffic.

Comments on Circulation and Infrastructure, Community Resources, Safety, and Noise Elements

Ms. Stetson invited comments on the Circulation and Infrastructure, Community Resources, Safety, and Noise Elements.

Referring to the Circulation and Infrastructure Element, Commissioner Browning expressed concerns that areas of rough pavement on Skypark Drive and Madison Street, which he brought to the City's attention three years ago, are not scheduled to be repaired according to Table CI-4 and have instead been posted with "Rough Pavement Ahead" signs.

Transportation Planning Manager Semaan explained that the Circulation and Infrastructure Element addresses roadway improvements needed to add capacity to accommodate the future growth of the City and the areas of rough pavement mentioned by Commissioner Browning were maintenance issues, which he will bring to the attention of the Public Works Department.

Referring to the Safety Element (page S-33), Commissioner Browning related his understanding that the City has not come close to its goal of having a 7-day emergency water supply in storage and questioned when and how this will be accomplished.

Commissioner Uchima reported that there are frequent back-ups at the intersection of Skypark Drive/Lomita Boulevard during evening commute hours, but this intersection was not included in the list of scheduled improvements. Transportation Planning Manager Semaan advised that improvements at this intersection are already planned and awaiting approval from Caltrans.

Referring to the Circulation and Infrastructure Element, Commissioner Busch noted that under "Railroad and Commuter Rail Services" it indicates that Union Pacific is considering abandoning the Torrance branch of its line and requested information about the amount of land involved and who it would revert to. He noted that on page CR-43, it mentions that Torrance normally experiences better air quality than found in communities farther inland, and requested clarification of the inland communities being referenced.

Commissioner Skoll requested an update on completion dates for the Del Amo Boulevard Extension and Crenshaw Boulevard projects (CR-27). Deputy City Attorney Sullivan advised that the Del Amo Boulevard Extension was delayed due to complications in acquiring property from Dow Chemical and will not begin until 2010.

Referring to CR-16, Commissioner Skoll questioned whether there are plans to provide handicap access at Sur La Brea Park.

Housing Element

With the aid of slides, Ms. Stetson provided an overview of the Housing Element. She explained that the purpose of the Housing element is to identify opportunities for housing to meet the needs of all income levels; that it must be certified by the State and updated every five years; and that the Housing Element also includes policies to preserve and improve the existing housing stock and promote equal housing

opportunities. She noted that the Housing Element satisfies the City's RHNA allocation (1828 new units) and the State has agreed to certify it once it has been approved by the City Council.

Chairperson Weideman requested that staff provide an update of units credited toward Torrance's RHNA allocation in each category to date.

Commissioner Horwich voiced his opinion that there is no low cost housing in Torrance and doubted that the City's RHNA allocation for low-income housing could be met. Ms. Stetson explained that the City is not obligated to build low-income housing, only to create opportunities for it to be built, which is done by allowing higher densities.

Commissioner Horwich asked about the possibility of converting senior housing units to conventional units, and Ms. Stetson stated that the conversion would require that the development comply with applicable City codes for non-age restricted housing, including parking requirements.

In response to Commissioner Busch's inquiry, Transportation Planning Manager Semaan confirmed that Development Impact Fees (H-36) will be updated to reflect current fees.

Commissioner Busch pointed out that 40% of homes in Torrance were built 28-47 years ago and 44% were built 48-67 years ago, which could impact the City's infrastructure needs.

Commissioner Skoll recommended that sober living and court-placed student housing be included in the Housing Element.

The Commission recessed from 8:46 p.m. to 8:59 p.m.

Agenda Item 7 was considered out of order at this time.

7. COMMUNITY INPUT

Chairperson Weideman invited public comment.

Marjorie Morris, Torrance resident and owner of apartment building at 3728 Redondo Beach Boulevard, expressed concerns that the re-zoning of the Redondo Beach Boulevard study area would lead to overdevelopment. Stressing the need to maintain the character of the neighborhood, she contrasted an older two-story building, which has ample open space and front-facing entries, with a newer three-story complex that is walled and gated inviting no interaction with the neighborhood.

Planning Manager Lodan advised that the changes in General Plan designation proposed for the Redondo Beach Boulevard study area reflect the density as currently developed, which will ensure that properties can be rebuilt without having to comply with current development standards should they be damaged. He stated that he did not expect a lot of new development because lots would have to be combined to meet current standards.

Dale Lincoln, Wayne Avenue, thanked staff for incorporating one of his earlier suggestions into the General Plan and proposed the following addition to policies under CR16, Wildlife Habitat – “Survey and study the City’s open spaces and parklands to identify additional areas of existing or restorable wildlife habitat. At selected sites, develop restoration and enrichment programs to provide enjoyment and education to residents nearby in their local neighborhoods.”

Gavin Wasserman, representing TY Wholesale Nursery, 5221 Arvata, expressed concerns that a photograph of the nursery, which has been at this location for 50 years, was used to illustrate potential opportunities for developing bike trails/hiking paths on Edison rights-of-way (LU-70) and requested that the photograph be replaced with an undeveloped right-of-way.

Elaine Kong, Wade Avenue, noting that her property backs up to Sepulveda Boulevard, expressed concerns about noise and emissions from ever increasing traffic and the impact on nearby residents. She questioned the need to allow a density over 30 units per acre, when that meets RHNA requirements for low-income housing.

David Buxton, owner of Tormed Medical Building, 3440 Lomita Boulevard, noted that the Hospital/Medical Land Use Designation lists a maximum FAR (Floor Area Ratio) of 0.60, but allows for this maximum to be exceeded with the approval of the Planning Commission or City Council. He suggested that the maximum FAR be increased to 1.0 so people wishing to build medical offices would know exactly what is allowed and would not have to quibble over the FAR with the Planning Commission or City Council and risk costly redesigns.

Planning Manager Lodan explained that the current maximum is 0.60, which cannot be exceeded unless a Variance is granted, and staff’s goal was to provide an opportunity for medical-related developments to go above that maximum while still providing for Planning Commission oversight to ensure compatibility with surrounding properties.

Hans Chuang, on behalf of his father, owner of a business at 2412 Amsler Street, expressed concerns about the short notice for this hearing and requested information regarding the potential ramifications of the proposed rezoning of the Crenshaw/Amsler study area.

Planning Manager Lodan reported that notices for this meeting were mailed to affected property owners 10 days prior and this has been the procedure for the series of General Plan workshops that have been held over the past 4 years. He offered to have staff meet with Mr. Chuang to discuss his concerns.

Charles Deemer, Talisman Street, suggested that the Land Use Element include mention of the City’s efforts to comply with State recommendations for open space. He expressed concerns that the High Density Land Use Designation would allow over 44 units per acre and voiced his opinion that this designation should be eliminated, with the Medium-High Density (31.1 – 44 dwelling units per acre) to be the maximum allowed. He recommended that density standards address the number of bedrooms per unit since the impact of a three-bedroom unit is greater than a one-bedroom unit.

Commissioner Browning noted that many people in the audience had left due to the lateness of the hour and suggested that the public be allowed to comment first at the next workshop.

Planning Manager Lodan explained that the audience may have dwindled because staff provided answers to questions they had during the break.

6. PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND INPUT

In response to Commissioner Gibson's inquiry, Deputy Community Development Director Cessna discussed how the conversion from a senior development to a non-age restricted development could be accomplished.

Ms. Stetson advised that the conversion of age-restricted developments is not an issue that would be included in the General Plan.

Commissioner Skoll noted that the introduction to the General Plan mentions "guiding principles" and questioned whether any principles had been added or deleted from the previous General Plan. He stressed the need for the Zoning Ordinance, the Capital Improvement Plan, and the Capital Budget to be consistent with the General Plan. He also emphasized the importance of having measurable goals to ensure that the City can objectively evaluate the success or failure of the implementation of the General Plan.

In response to Chairperson Weideman's inquiry, Planning Manager Lodan advised that changes to the Zoning Code would take place after changes in Land Use Designations have been approved and would be subject to a similar review process, including workshops and public hearings.

Commissioner Busch, echoed by Commissioner Browning and Commissioner Skoll, commended staff and consultants for doing an excellent job on the presentation and the General Plan.

Commissioner Browning thanked Mr. Deemer for providing information regarding water storage during the break.

Commissioner Uchima recalled that the issue of terrorism was discussed early on in this process and expressed concerns that the Safety Element does not specifically address this topic. He asked that the consultant look into this issue since the refinery would be a prime target for a terrorist attack.

Commissioner Horwich noted that the update of the Strategic Plan was recently completed and it is a companion item to the General Plan. He encouraged people to review the Strategic Plan because it contains valuable information.

Chairperson Weideman requested that information be provided regarding how the Strategic Plan was integrated into the General Plan.

Chairperson Weideman voiced his opinion that the section on historic preservation was weak given the public input on this topic and requested an explanation as to why this issue had not been given more emphasis.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Planning Manager Lodan thanked the Commission and the public for their comments and noted that the next workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, October 14, 2009, at which staff will provide responses to any unanswered questions from tonight's workshop and introduce the Environmental Impact Report. He reported that the final Planning Commission Workshop/ Public Hearing on the draft General Plan will be held on Wednesday, October 28, 2009 and the Commission will be making a recommendation at that time to be forwarded to the City Council.

Commissioner Browning requested an excused absence for the October 7, 2009 Planning Commission meeting; hearing no objection, Chairman Weideman so ordered.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 10:05 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, October 7, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as Submitted October 28, 2009 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
